JONES

A Christmas Gift That Went A-Begging

RUTH

Rothrock

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"When he jerked the bell at the 'Lion Gate' he nearly pulled it out."

See page 44.

GEORGE WASHINGTON JONES

A CHRISTMAS GIFT THAT WENT A-BEGGING

BY

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With Pictures by Edward Potthast

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CHAPTER I

MERRY CHRISTMAS

IT is sad to be little and poor and black, and to have no relations.

It is sad at any time, but on Christmas it seems even more so, for at this blessed season all the blessed things of life appear to count for more than on ordinary days.

Little George Washington Jones waked

early on Christmas morning, and he saw the stockings stuffed with toys hanging before the mantel—but he lay very still. He did not feel like getting up.

Even when the other children waked and began scrambling for their stockings, he kept his eyes shut and did not move, although he did really peep with the eye next the blanket—just to see what they were getting.

He peeped as long as it did any good to peep; but one can't see anything when tears keep coming and coming, and so after awhile George just closed his eyes, and did n't try to see any more.

But he could hear. He heard Pete's tin horn even before he heard Pete say, "Hello! List'n at my ho'n!" And presently he heard little wheels rattling on the floor, and a drum, and after a while there were loud reports of a toy pistol,

and he smelled the powder, and he said to himself, "I hears Christmas—an' I smells it, too!" which just about expressed it.

And he cried softly—'way down in his little stomach under the blankets.

George stayed in bed as long as he dared—until he smelled the bacon frying for breakfast, in fact—and then, of course, he had to get up, and he made a brave effort to behave in as natural a way as possible, and not to show that he felt lonely. Indeed, when he went into the kitchen, where the family were, and he saw all the children's new Christmas things, he *tried* to be pleased.

And so he was—in a way—but his lip would n't quite behave itself and stop trembling. And then when little Tom's mother, Caroline, said to him, "Let George blow yo' horn a little while,

son," he could n't blow it to save his life.

And when they all saw how he felt, and little Luce Ann broke all the stomach out of her candy cow and gave it to him, and M'ria Jane offered to let him play her jew's-harp, and even the baby, seeing that something was wrong, toddled up and wanted to kiss him, he suddenly started to bawl aloud.

And then he was ashamed of bawling, and began wiping his eyes on his sleeves and saying "Dog-gone!" to try to appear more manly.

And then old Uncle Ben called him over to where he sat and patted him on the head, and said, "Don't fret, honey. Gord knows best," which was the worst of all, as it reminded him that his grandfather had died only three days before, and that he had n't a relation in the

world, and was only staying with "Aunt Caroline," who was n't his real aunt at all, just for a few days, "until something could be done for him."

His grandfather had often spoken to him of "going home," and told him he might have to go suddenly, and that his little grandson would be lonely for a time —but that, after a while, "it would pass off."

And he warned him that he would almost surely have hard times—for a while—harder than he himself had ever had, because, as he expressed it, he had "lived in clover" all his life.

He had been selected by his master from five hundred field hands, in the old slave days, and sent as a Christmas gift to the loveliest and sweetest mistress in all the world.

This was when he was a tiny boy,

younger than George, and he had "f'om dat time for'rd, jest lived right along wid de quality," so he said.

The story of his life was one upon which he had loved to dwell. It was like a beautiful fairy-tale, in which the young mistress was the princess and old Solon —or young Solon, as he was then—the little black page always at her elbow when needed. Like most of the old plantation stories, it ended with—"an' den de war come."

The sad time since the war George almost remembered, or he thought he did, for his name had been in it whenever his grandfather told it; and it was not in any way like a fairy tale.

Everything was different. The plantation was gone to strangers, and all the old white folks were dead, and their children scattered—and now even old Solon

had "gone home," too, and here was George left—just George, ten years old, little, black, sensitive, not very strong—just George.

George knew that "Aunt Ca'line" had all the children she needed already, and so she would n't want any second-hand boys—"for keeps." It was very kind of her to let him stay—for a while.

Indeed, to tell the truth, little simple-hearted George Washington Jones would not have been satisfied to belong to Aunt Ca'line, even if she had wished it, and the reason seems almost funny, until one understands it.

It was because she was colored.

He was black, himself, it is true, and so had been his grandfather and all his near relations, and he never would have thought of objecting to the color of his own family.

But when it came to attaching himself to strangers—to "b'longin'," as he expressed it to himself—that was another thing. All his people had lived with "folks," and when an old-time darkey says "folks," he means quality white folks, "none o' yo' po' white trash."

His grandfather had begun service standing behind his young mistress's chair, fanning her, while she practiced her music lessons, lifting the heavy books from the rack and putting them back, and then he had led her horse to the door and arranged her skirts while she placed her little foot in the stirrup, which he adjusted. Then he had ridden behind her, to be on call if she should need him. And when she had married he had been her coachman.

The little boy thought a great deal about all this while he lay on his pallet

under Aunt Ca'line's roof. He knew changes were coming for him, and he wondered, when all should be settled, what sort of "folks" he would have—and how he was to get them.

It was while he lay there two nights before Christmas that a plan came into his mind. And while he was turning it over, Pete, who lay in the next pallet, said aloud: "Day after to-morrow 'll be Christmas." And then all the children began wondering what Santa Claus would fetch them. And some one asked George what he wanted, and he said he would n't tell. This made them curious, and so they began guessing.

"Is it a toot-horn?" said one.

"Better 'n dat!" replied George.

"Is it a wagon?"

"Better 'n dat!"

"Is it a roller-horse?"

"No, better 'n dat!"

"Well—is it gold?"

"Better 'n dat!"

"Silver?"

"Better 'n dat!"

"Diamonds?"

"Better 'n dat!"

"Oh, shoo! Dey ain' got no better 'n dat!" The guessers were impatient, and so they changed the form of their question.

"Does you expec' to git it?" asked Pete, rising on his elbow. There was doubt expressed in his question, and George resented it.

"Yas, I expects to git it," he answered, with spirit. "You reckon I gwine fool my time away, wushin' for som'h'n' 'nother I ain't got no chance o' gittin'?"

Pete dropped on his pillow to think it over, and Tom called out from the crib:

"Who gwine to fetch it to you? Santa Claus?"

George hesitated just a moment. Then he answered:

"Nobody ain't gwine fetch it to me. I would n't trus' 'em. I gwine arter it myself."

This was really very interesting, and if Pete and the other children wondered over it, so did George himself.

Under fire of their persistent questionings, he had rashly committed himself to a plan which had popped into his head barely five minutes before, and it was a plan which would change his whole life.

And after this he refused to say another word on the subject. The fact is, he was too much excited over it to trust himself to speak aloud, and it was one of those things which grow more exciting the more they are thought about.

CHAPTER II

"SAME TO YOU, SIR"

THE Christmas gift which George had wished for—that he declared he was going to have—was no less than this:

It was a beautiful young mistress.

In speaking of the great day of his life, his grandfather had often said: "Of co'se, when I was give to my yo'ng-lady-mistus, by dat same ac' she was give to me, for my Christmus gif'. You can't give a pusson a servant widout givin' de servant a boss."

And so, at this critical moment, when his standing among the children was

being impeached, George made the decision of his life.

He would be a Christmas gift to some great, fair lady of high degree. There were many beautiful women living in the handsome houses along Prytania Street—in the lovely places where the lawns and stables and carriage-ways were.

He would simply start out on Christmas morning, ring the bell at a gate where one of the "fairy-ladies" lived, and tell her that he was her Christmas gift, and that would settle it.

He became suddenly so full of the idea that he slipped away after breakfast and took a long walk, studying up the different places, so as to decide where to go next morning.

There was one, which was very tempting, where a crowd of boys played in the

yard, but it did not satisfy his imagination.

To do this there would have to be the young mistress, a sweet "beauty-lady," and he would like her to have long yellow curls, and, if possible, he would have her play on a gilt harp, as his "granddaddy's mistus" had done.

Of course, however, he could not insist on the harp. When young ladies played the harp, in all probability they generally played it indoors, and little colored boys passing along the street could n't tell of a certainty who played harps and who did n't.

George walked a long way this morning—up one side of the street and down the other, but he could not make up his mind. When he got home supper was ready, but as soon as it was over he slipped to the garret-room, and, going to

"'*Wush't I was a little purtier,' he lamented.*"

his little hair-trunk, selected his "Sunday clo'es," and began trying them on.

He wanted to realize what manner of Christmas gift he was going to appear. The "pants" had belonged to a bigger boy before they became his, and they had to be "gallused up" pretty high; and the coat was rather short in the sleeves; and his shoes were not mates, one being black and the other tan. But he had a white shirt which he had worn only once—to his grandfather's funeral—and a military cap—and when he presently glanced at himself in the mirror of the children's bureau, he said: "White shirts and soljer caps dey sho' does set a pusson off!"

A great many poor children, both black and white, wore old soldier caps in those days, gray or blue left-overs from the war, just as they happened to get

them. George's was blue, and it had a bullet-hole in it which made him feel very dangerous whenever he wore it.

The cracks in the old mirror divided him into sections as he strutted before it, but, by a very simple effort of the imagination, he reconstructed a very presentable "little nigger."

He thought of himself in this way, because he remembered that when his grandfather was sent as a Christmas present, there was a little paper tied to his arm by a blue ribbon, and on it were written these lines:

> "I 'm a little Christmas nigger,
> I ain't very big,
> But I 'll soon grow bigger."

These lines were written as a playful introduction by his young mistress's father, and were merrily received.

George would have liked a "po'try

verse'' of his own making to pin to himself, but that was impossible, as he barely knew his primer. He could recite these same lines, though, as he approached the young lady of his choice, and so he would.

He was a ''little nigger,'' and they would just suit.

He moved back a few paces, courtesied to the glass, and, after slowly repeating the words, he stopped and critically surveyed himself.

''Wush 't I was a little purtier,'' he lamented, low in his throat but quite seriously; ''but maybe she won't mind, ef I step high an' ac' mannerly.''

At which, squaring his shoulders, he strutted back and forth several times.

When the rehearsal was over, he felt in better spirits, and, slipping off his clothes and hiding them away again, he got into bed and tried to go to sleep. He

could not trust himself to meet any of the children again to-night. "I got too bad a 'tackt o' de dry grins—dey'd know som'h'n' was up!" he chuckled to his pillow, as he shut his eyes.

And presently, when he was about half-way to dreamland, he seemed to see his grandfather's face, looking at him proudly, and he thought:

"Yas, an' he'll be prouder yit ef he looks down on me day after to-morrer an' sees me wid my new folks."

And by this time he was all the way into the dream country, and he saw himself a serious little black boy in a Continental coat and knee breeches and with a feather in his hat, following behind the new mistress and carrying her book, just as his grandfather had so often described himself as doing in the old days.

And instead of Aunt Caroline's roof,

there seemed beautiful arching trees above his head, and when he turned in his sleep and a real mocking-bird sang lustily under the moon in the honeysuckle vine outside Caroline's window, he thought it came from the branches of the dream-trees, loud and clear above the noise of hoofs and carriage wheels rattling up the drive to the great house—all in the dreamland.

It seems strange that after going to bed with so brave a heart and dreaming dreams so splendid, he should have been so easily upset in the morning; but when he saw the cheap toys sticking out of the stockings, mocking him with their wooden elbows and their curved eyebrows, something unusual seemed to happen 'way down in his little inside, and everything went wrong for some minutes. So he thrust his head under the cover and let

the trouble sob itself away quietly, and he said in his mind, "Ef I had des a f-f-few folks—even ef dey was colored—" And just about then it was that the other children waked and the great day began.

When breakfast was over, George felt in better spirits, and he said to himself, "Time for me to be gwine—ef I'm gwine —an' I sho' is gwine—ef de court knows itse'f." And he even whistled softly while he climbed the ladder to the garret and began to dress for his journey.

When he was ready, he selected a few cherished things from his grandfather's "remaindings," tied them with his surplus garments in an old bandana handkerchief, attached the bundle to his umbrella, "'cazen it mought rain," and swinging it before him, he climbed out on the roof, let himself down through a

fig-tree into the yard, and was soon out in the street, his bundle over his shoulder.

As he looked down at his feet, he regretted that his shoes were not mates, and he suddenly remembered that an old cobbler and shoeblack, who lived around the corner, had once spoken pleasantly to him, and he thought it would be well just to pass by there.

The old man had moved his chair inside to-day, but he sat within his door.

George walked very slowly until he was just opposite him, and then he stopped short and looked down at his own shoes—and then at the bootblack.

Mr. Pat Foley's little blue eyes twinkled.

"Good moornin' to ye! An' a merry Christmas an' a happy New Year, an' manny returns av the same!" he said,

playfully, and then, following the suggestion of the boy's glances, he added:

"I see ye 've brought me a job—an' a bully job it is! Whip off yer soljer cap and shtep in!"

"I ain't got no money," said the boy, hesitatingly. Then, seeing that Mr. Foley was not appalled by his confessed poverty, he hastened to add:

"But I 'spec's to be a heap richer—after to-day—ef you 'd trus' me—"

"Thrust northin'!" laughed Pat, "but if ye 'll ascind the chair av state, sure I 'll give ye a shine for yer Christmas, so I wull."

And, as the boy, grinning, took his seat, he added:

"Which 'll it be, now? Wull I black the tan boot or tan the congress gaiter?"

"Which does you think would look de purtiest?"

"'*Black 'em!*'"

George extended both feet for consideration as he spoke.

"Well, that depinds," advised Pat. "Forr a picnic or a thrip on a yacht, I 'd tan the black one, but if I was starrtin' out forr a prisentation to a queen, sure, I 'd have the two o' thim nately blacked."

"Black 'em!" snapped George, and, as Pat polished away, he added, timidly:

"Dey ain't no way o' tightenin' up de injine-rubber at de sides o' de gaiter-one, is dey?"

"Don't touch that for yer life!" replied Pat. "Injian-rubber is like a man's conscience. Let go av ut, an' you 've a bad job. But that shoe becomes you turrible, all the same—it wuth its partner across the way. Sure, they 're like enough for joy. The happiest couples in life do be contrasts, wan ag'in' the other. If I was gettin' ye for

a Christmas present, now, to shtand up on me mantel-shelf, I would n't take northin' for the comical expression o' thim two shoes."

The boy looked quickly into Pat's face.

"How 'd you know about it?" he asked, eagerly.

"Know about what?" said Pat.

"Why, 'bout me bein' a Christmas gif'! I ain't told nobody. De way you see what's in my head, you mus' be hoodooed." He was grinning all over.

"Sure an' I am that! Ye done ut wud yer beauty!"

Pat's shoulders shook with laughter, and as he put a finishing touch to the shoes, he added:

"I always know a lad that 's borrn av a Christmas be the look in his eye—an' *the way his hair currls!* Well, there 's blessin' in a holy day, sure! Here 's

good luck to ye—an' hopin' to see ye better shod for life's journey!"

"He don't know nuthin' about it, after all," George chuckled while he strode out the door, grinning appreciation even before he said, replacing his cap while he turned into the street, "Same to you, Mister!"

This was one of his best "mannerly answers," carefully taught him by his grandfather, who had assured him that it was always a safe thing to say, as it was quite as able to turn an insult back where it belonged as to answer blessings in kind.

And so, when the boy reached the corner and, looking back, saw Pat wave his hand to him from his door, he lifted his cap and called back again, quite loudly this time:

"Same to you, sir!"

CHAPTER III

THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD

IT was a lovely Christmas day, warm with a sweet flower-scented breeze from the gardens along Prytania Street —everybody in New Orleans knows about Christmases like this—and when the Christmas gift started down between the handsome houses that face the street on either side, he held his head high, but his heart thumped so that he panted a little.

But he would get over this, as there was no hurry. He could ring any gate bell any minute, and before you could say Jack Robinson he would belong on the inside.

There was a big house somewhere, with two lions of stone guarding the front steps. If he could find this place to-day, he would ask if a yellow-haired lady who played on a gilt harp lived there, and, if so, he would make his bow and his speech —and the thing would be done.

While he was thinking of this and saying to himself, "I wonder do dem rock lions think I be a-skeered of 'em," there came out upon the porch of one of the fine houses a lovely young lady, who began to gather roses from the trellis.

"I 'll take you—harp or no harp," he said to himself, and hesitating just a minute to get a good breath, he reached up and pulled the gate bell. And at that moment exactly, she disappeared in the door and a fat black woman answered his ring.

"Huccome you foolin' wid dat bell, you

sassy nigger?'' she called, angrily; so angrily that George decided that he was n't decided whether he wanted to go there to live or not, and so he said:

''Do de young lady wha' live heah play on de jew's-harp?''

He meant ''gold harp,'' and indeed he thought he had said it. George was quite a performer on the lesser instrument, but his own *heart*-strings were trembling so that he was like a troubled little harp himself, and no harp ever knows more than to tremble when it is struck.

''Jew's-harp!'' the woman repeated, contemptuously. ''You 's a-passin' yourself in at de wrong gate. Git away f'om heah! Scat!''

It was a long time before George found courage to stop again; but after a while an open gate tempted him and he walked

blandly in, hoping that a fair-haired princess might herself open the door, which, indeed, she happened to do, but when she looked down at him and said: "Well?" in a freezing tone, he could n't have made his speech to save his life.

"Well?" she repeated. "What do you want?"

And he answered rapidly: "I don't want nothin'! I was des a-passin' by an' I—I thought I'd drap in an'—an'—"

He had already turned to go, when he heard her say to a servant:

"Take him around to the kitchen. Maybe he's hungry."

This was not pleasant in the circumstances, and, although it was a most impolite thing to do, he called out over his shoulder as he neared the gate:

"I ain't no beggar! I come to fetch *you* a present—but *I done changed my mind!*"

At two other places the servants refused to show him in unless he would tell his errand, and as he would not offer himself to a mistress whom he had never seen, he had to go away.

All this took up time, and, besides, it used up courage, which was even more serious. When he had been walking an hour, he had not offered himself to anybody. But he kept walking.

The streets were filling with people going to church, many of them beautiful ladies with kind faces, and he said to himself: "I sho' is got a daisy lot to pick an' choose from."

The trouble was he could not prudently approach them on the street, not knowing what sort of houses they lived

in—and when they went into church he lost them.

He was getting pretty tired, and so, when, after a few more rebuffs, he rang another bell, he called out: *"Want a boy in heah?"* The Christmas gift part he could bring in afterward—if the lady suited.

But the gate slammed on the servant's "No!" and, shivering, he passed on.

There was a sweet-looking young lady ahead of him once, and he hastened to overtake her. "Lady," he said, at her elbow, "does you know air nice white 'oman wha' want a lakly boy—about my size—for a Chr—"

Before George could finish his sentence she had dropped a nickel in his hand and hurried on. The boy looked at the coin and his eyes filled.

"Huccome dey all takes me for a beg-

gar," he said aloud, "wid dis—dis white shirt on—an'—an' all deze clo'es?"

A real beggar, placarded "Blind," sat with a tin cup beside him against a fence near, and George, seeing that when he glanced at the tin cup it moved toward him, looked hard at it, and then at the nickel.

Then he looked at the fruit-stand across the way, and when he presently passed down the other side there were five bananas in his hand—and then four—and by the time he reached the gate where the lions were, five empty banana skins lay along the gutter, and their recent fillings were being converted into courage, and the courage was fast permeating George Washington Jones; so that when he jerked the bell at the "lion gate," he nearly pulled it out, and a great old dog barked at him so suddenly that when the

servant came to the gate there was no one there.

George was already asking the gardener at the second gate beyond if his mistress did n't need a little boy.

She did not need one.

Nobody answered the next bell, or the next, and at the one beyond, George called out to a servant:

"Ask de lady o' de house do she want *a Christmas gif' of a handy little bo-o-o-y!*" and as he said it, his lip quivered dangerously.

She did n't want one, either. And after this he offered himself frankly at all the best houses.

It was growing late, and his umbrella and bundle were getting heavier and heavier. Besides, if the mistresses matched the houses and the gardens, almost any one of them would do now.

But evidently boys were not in demand. Nobody wanted one—not even as a gift.

At several houses the people laughed at the idea, and asked him a question or two, and gave him a cake or an apple. One lady did say that she might try him, if he were only a little bigger, whereupon George declared he *was bigger!*

"Yas 'm, I IS BIGGER!" he insisted. "*Hit 's deze heah pants! Dey make me look little—day got so much room in 'em!*"

And then remembering his poem, he placed his hand on his breast and recited it bravely. The assembled family fairly screamed with delight over his performance, and told him that if he would come around later when the men of the family were at home, and do it over again, they would give him his dinner and a dollar.

" 'Yas'm, I is bigger!' he insisted. 'Hit's deze heah pants.' "

They seemed to think the whole thing was a joke.

Evidently they did not know about old-time quality ways.

The sun was getting low when George turned out of the avenue of noble houses into a side street.

His stomach was full of assorted gratuities, and it ached with the unfriendliness thereof. He did not know what else to do, and so he walked on.

The neighborhood thinned out, and cheapened as he went, and after a while the heads of families sat in shirt sleeves on the front stoops, and some of them were colored.

At one gate there was an empty bench, and he sat down. Of course, it was foolish to come out here, but the very thought of ringing any more bells on the avenue sickened him.

He would not go back to Aunt Ca'line and face the children until he should have something to tell. Of course, he would go then. He looked out toward the swamp and back to the avenue, and two great tears came slowly into his eyes—and ran over.

CHAPTER IV

SARAH

AND just then a fat, brown woman wearing a purple calico dress came out of the gate and sat beside him. And when she saw his tears and his bundle and his old shoes, she took her apron and wiped his eyes and said, softly:

"Nemmine."

And George put his head in her lap and sobbed, while she smoothed his hair with her warm hand, and she wiped her own eyes.

Dark comes suddenly on Christmas, and when, after a while, Sarah, the brown woman, walked into the house,

with her arm around the boy, she lit her candle. Then she took off his cap and hung it up, and laid his bundle on a little bed.

The two must have talked it all out on the little bench at the gate, for they seemed to understand each other. After she lit the candle, she went presently and fetched a small tintype and put it in George's hand. It was the picture of a little black boy.

"Dis is him," she said, "befo' he was took sick." And then she added: "When I looked out an' saw yo' little legs hangin' under the bench, it seemed like he had come back to me. You favors him consid'ble—in the legs. Yo' folks must 'a' made you loney too soon."

"B-but he was a heap purtier 'n what I is," George stammered. And the woman, looking him over, said: "You 'd

look mighty diff'ent, baby, git a handy 'oman aholt o' you—wid a few buttons—" And presently she added: "Dat boughten suit he 's got on in de picture—I got it put away—it 'd jes' about fit you, but, of co'se, less 'n you was a mighty good boy—"

"I 'm feared I ain't good enough—not fer *dat,*" George replied, thoughtfully. "I sins awful sometimes. Des a while ago I sassed a white 'oman, caze I thought she scorned me wid her eye. An' den I see she was cross-eyed."

"Den you ought to tol' her dat you was sorry, boy."

"I would 'a' done it, but she up an' flung a brickbat at me. She was a Irish lady."

There were two at supper that night in Sarah's cabin, and when she went to set the table, she hesitated some time

before she took from the cupboard a little tin plate with the alphabet pressed into its rim, and set it beside her own. And when George began spelling his name on the plate, she made an excuse to go back to the cupboard for something she did not need, and when she came back she filled his glass, although it was only half emptied.

Notwithstanding the late lamented bananas and their hasty and disastrous burial, George ate heartily, but the woman only minced, and often she looked tenderly at the boy beside her—but the face she saw was the one in the tintype.

It was a cozy little supper, and after it was over she and her small guest sat and talked as those talk who have always known each other.

It was still early when she put him to bed—for she saw that he was very tired.

He must have confided his whole plan to her, for while she tucked him in she was saying:

"Yes, I know de lady at de lion gate; she 's lookin' for a little boy—to bresh de flies off 'n her, an' hunt her spec's, an' —what dat you say? No, dey ain't no yo'ng misses in dat house. An' de ole lady, she 's mighty deef and religious. But she 's lookin' for a hones' little boy widout no kin—and I know she 'd take you in a minute. An' you could straddle de lions and play horsey on 'em, when you war n't busy—an' you 'd have brass buttons, an' tote a silver tray—an' take in de ladies' visitin' tickets—an' ''—

She leaned beside him on the bed now, and, remembering his little colic, she was rubbing her hand gently over his body as she spoke.

"An' ef you stays wid me," she con-

tinued, "you know I takes in washin', an' you 'd haf to help me lif' my tubs an' empty suds—an' tote clo'es back an' fo'th, too, sometimes. My little Joe, he was jes' as stiddy as a man. He could count change—an' tell time by de clock—but, of co'se, you 'd learn all dat."

George did not answer right off, but presently he said: "I—I—I ain't dissipated, no ways—but I ain't sho' ef I 'm stiddy or not, b-b-but I kin *tell time!* I got gran'daddy's silver watch—and I got his spec's, too. An' maybe dey mought suit yo' eyes—ef—ef—"

Neither one said anything for quite a while, and then the boy spoke again. "Sposen I was to stay w-w-wid you, right along, des so, wh-wh-what kin would you be to me?"

She leaned nearer him as she answered.

"I 'd be des same as yo' mammy, baby."

There was another silence, and then he spoke again:

"And does mammies rub dey little boys' belly-aches away dis-a-way, lak you rubbin' mine?"

"Dey does, ef it eases 'em, honey. *He* used to like me to rub his little pains when he over-e't, or ef he was chilled, maybe—but ef it frets you—" She began taking her hand away, but he caught it in both his and drew it back.

"Keep orn," he muttered.

As she began stroking his body again, he turned his head, not seeming to know that he did it, until it just fitted into the soft warm place beneath her chin—against her breast and shoulder.

"An'—an'—an' wh—wh—what kin would I be to—to you?" he sobbed after

a while. She took a long time to answer this. And then she said:

"You jes' be my little boy." And in a minute she added: "Did n't you take notice to dat little plate I give you to eat yo' supper out 'n? He used to spell his name on dat plate, an' when I set it out for you, I say to myself: 'Ef he spells his titles out on it I 'll take it for a sign from Heaven'—dat is, of co'se, ef you wants to stay."

For answer, a thin, black arm came from under the cover and lay over the woman's shoulder, and had he not fallen under the mantle of sleep while she talked so long, into her ear would have come a faint whisper: "I gwine to stay." As it was, the words were never formed, even in his heart, where sweet surrender of sleep held sway.

And she suddenly knew by his regular

breathing that he slept, and she laid her cheek against his hair, and wet it with her tears.

When she had presently lifted his head, and with soft, undisturbing maternal touch, laid it back upon the pillow, she returned to the table in the other room and looked at the little plate and the tintype, and she felt the edge of her old sorrow anew, and she wiped her eyes with her apron while she cleared the table, and set back her own boy's particular chair, and hung the blue soldier cap beside the bit of faded felt still limply shaped to her boy's head behind the door.

She did not sit and think or plan tonight. She was tired and sleepy, and although the personal touch of the child so like her own had been to her almost like the opening of a grave, she did not forget to put her clothes to soak, or to

water the pot of sweet basil which she kept in her front window.

Before going to her own bed, however, she stopped beside the sleeping boy. She even lifted his clothes from the chair beside the bed and held them up before her.

"De two sho' does favor," she said, softly. "Dey favors in ways mo' 'n dey do in looks, even. An' I see he ain't no slouch, nuther. De seat o' de breeches is good enough, but dey thin at de knees. He keeps gwine, an'—an'—what 's dis?"

She had slipped her fingers into his pocket.

"Strings an' nails! I declare! Dey sho' does favor! Even to what dey 'll pick up an' cherish. Po' little man! I wonder is God A'mighty done tooken notice to my cravin—an' sont de chile to me—to stay. *I wonders!*"

CHAPTER V

THE LIONS' CALL

IT was fortunate that sleep had overtaken the tired child just at the moment when all his little bodily ills were being ministered to, and his heart soothed into forgetfulness, for otherwise, in committing himself fully to the new and grateful relationship so sincerely and yet so insidiously offered, as he surely would have done, he would have made a mistake.

For when he had waked in the morning, and after a single bewildered moment recovered his bearings, things began rapidly to resume their former values.

Before everything else, he was, of course, his grandfather's grandson.

When the whole boy was awake, and rested, not only his weary physical part, but his alert spirit and his ambitions, there came with the awakening a sudden humiliating sense of failure.

Sarah's home was quite comfortable, and her loving ministrations were most disarming, and yet, her poor washerwoman's cabin, never free from a subtle odor of the tubs, had to bear comparison in the boy's keen mind with affluent homes in which it seemed to be literally noble service to only stand and wait.

There were many such, almost certainly easily within reach, and the fact that the sentimental entry which he had tried to make had proven a failure in the differing conditions did not prove the boy unfit for such honorable service as had

cheered an old man's life, even in the memory of it.

The first thing George did was to throw into the fire the bit of paper on which he had laboriously printed his gift speech. He had provided himself with this to bring forth in case of nervous failure of speech which sometimes set him stammering.

He slipped it under the kettle when Sarah was not looking his way, and as he did so, seeing her leave the room, he mumbled:

"I wonder ef Gord took de trouble to look on, an' see what a Christmas fool I made o' myself," and he continued in thought, "de nex' time I goes, I 'll go wid common sense an' week-day manners. Why—ef a boy o' my size had 'a' come up to me and axed me to tek him for a Christmas present—an' no better regu-

lated in his clo'es—I 'd 'a' *knowed* he was crazy."

His idea now was to make dignified and judicious application for work—such work as would honor the proud old man who had not only set his standards for him, but whose life had always been worthy of them.

In the clear light of a new day, with his legs rested and his courage as the morning, George's mind seemed quite naturally to swing back to the great gate where the lions continuously crouched.

He was standing before a window, looking out, when Sarah came in. "Well!" she exclaimed, smiling. "You don't favor de tired little human I put to bed last night. You sho' was one tired man."

"Yas 'm, I sho' was!" the boy answered, "an' I went to sleep widout no

rockin'. Dat was half becaze my heart was down. I done had my palate down befo' to-day, an' had to git somebody to tie up my top lock an' wrop it tighter an' tighter tel de palate h'isted itself. But when a man's *heart* gits down, I 'spec' dey ain't no way to lif' it up—not no suddent way."

"It rises itself, dough, over a good night's sleep," said Sarah; "sleep an' a tub o' cold water 'll raise anybody's courage." She pointed to the shed door as she spoke.

"Yonder yo' tub, boy! Go jump in! An' take dat bar o' lye-soap off de wash-boa'd an' scour yo'self good, whilst I sews on a button or so for yer—an' mend deze galluses."

"An' dey sho' does need it!" chuckled George. "Great clo'es dey was for a Christmas gif', *to* be sho'!"

"Is you a Christmas gif'?" Sarah's heart seemed to jump into her throat when she put the question.

"No, ma'am! I ain't! I got better sense over night! Seem like in my sleep I must 'a' seen myself *as I is!* No wonder dey all turned me down! *Nobody* would n't 'a' took me, de way I looked outside—an' dey could n't see my heart."

The woman turned longing eyes toward the tub, but she said nothing.

If only he had expressed an unshaken resolve to be this fanciful thing, whether or no, how simple it would have been to settle it! While she had asked him if he were to be a Christmas gift, she felt herself impelled to go to the bath-tub and to "rub him down" a bit as she had done her own boy.

But George's answer made her suddenly afraid of suffering. She put his

clothes conveniently for him and went to her stove.

But when he came to her a few moments later, all dressed and with even a dim suggestion of a "part" down the middle of his kinky hair, Sarah bade him be seated, and hastened to pile his plate —the same circle of tin with everybody's name on earth hidden in its rim—and the bowl of coffee beside it, a great yellow affair with blue stripes for style, was nearly half cream, poured from the top of her milk can.

"Does you like yo' corn-brade cold or het?" Caze I fixed part bofe ways."

"Het, please, m'am," he answered, unhesitatingly, and poor Sarah caught her breath as she glanced at the hat and cap hanging together behind the door. And she almost wished he had said "cold"—if he was not to be a Christmas

gift, after all—and this tender episode, soon to be passed, leaving her more consciously alone than ever, would have one pang less in the retrospect. Her lost boy always wanted his corn-bread heated over, or, as she said it, "het."

There was great attraction in the atmosphere of Sarah's home and in the place in her affections, which he knew himself to fill. Still the habit of the boy's life had been to project himself so fully into his grandfather's reminiscences that he really felt an air of affluence to be his by a sort of hereditary right.

"Whar yo' toof-picks?" he asked, suddenly, of Sarah, looking calmly out the window as he spoke.

The yearning woman had been repressing an eagerness in serving her guest until now, but she suddenly realized herself a trifle forbearing while she

obediently stepped from her back door and cut several fine thorns from her single orange-tree and laid them beside the boy's plate.

His quick "Thanky, ma'am," and the alacrity with which he covered them with his little black fingers, was somewhat appeasing, however, and she even laughed with him while he added:

"Caze dey say dat when a man starts out to make his fortune, ef he kin pick his toofs an' spit an' cuss right smart, he 'll find luck aroun' de fus' corner—an' ef dey 's on'y a clair moon in sight, horn up, so she can't spill out his money for him—dey 's wealth an' riches layin' in his path thick for him to gather."

He had thrust the end of one of the orange-thorns between his lips as he spoke, softening its point and sipping its flavor, as one naturally treats an orange-

thorn, and presently he spat with fine spirit and aim through an opening in the honeysuckles beyond the window.

"I never cusses," he added, presently, "an' I ain't gwine to practice it now. I can't see how it could help a man in de right way—not reel cussin'. I has my own cuss-words, but dey 's private an' des middlin' bad."

He spat again—using the same right of way as before.

"I could hit a mark dat way nine times out o' eight—ef dey had dat many," he remarked, dryly; "but I was n't aimin' to *hit* dis time. I aimed to miss—an' I done it, too."

"Miss what?" said the suddenly doubting Sarah. "Dat 's a purty big brag for a man o' yo' size."

"Dey 's a last year's bird nest in dem dry honeysuckle tangles, an' I never

harms no nest whilst de owner 's away—but ef you 'll gimme som'h'n' round, I 'll land it in de nest for yer. One o' dem ole swiveled chiny-berries 'll do. I 'll put a last year berry in his last year nest, an' maybe de bird 'll think he forgot it, whilst he was movin' on. Dey tas'es wuss 'n bermafuge, but it won't stay in my mouf to hurt. Reach me one, please ma'am."

The china-trees grew low above the bench at Sarah's door, and "just for the fun of the thing," she stepped out and brought in a bunch of the berries.

"Keep yo' eye on it!" the boy exclaimed, lowering his head a trifle while he sent a missile quite into the heart of the clump. "Now, go look in," he laughed, grasping his bundles, "caze I mus' be gwine. Yas, I see you found it, but leave it alone! Dat 's a robin's nest,

an' he 's a poor builder. But ef he comes back dey 's one good drunk in dat berry for him—dat an' what he 'll pick out o' de tree when his appetite 's started. I used to ketch my robins drunk in de grass under the chiny-trees, an' sober 'em up an' sell 'em, but dey ain't much money in 'em. Br'ilin' 'em for gran'daddy paid better. Him an' his pickaninny, we used to have our good times, you bet! Well, so long, Aunt Sarah! An' thanky, ma'am, once mo'. I got dat big bundle o' lunch, an' I 'll be chewin' an' thinkin' about you long befo' you 'd advise me to eat it ef you was along, I reckon."

"Maybe it 's jest as well," Sarah thought as she hastily threw a tear from her eye. "He ain't no common chile—an' he mought 'a' gimme trouble."

She was wrapping her half loaf in a

damp towel, and had stooped before the cupboard to put it in.

"Yit an' still," she added, as she lifted herself from contemplation of her cold larder, "yit an' still, I'd ruther take my trouble out 'n a full heart 'n an empty one—ef it was Gord's will."

She thought the boy had gone, but when she went to the door, really intending to follow him with her eye, she discovered him standing in the gateway, ten feet or more beyond her door-step. Her tread was soft, and so George had not discovered her when he turned back.

"I been standin' here, sayin' it over, to see who 's *it,*" he said, quite as calmly as if he were remarking about the weather. "I took dis sycamo'-tree on de *banquette** to stan' on for you—an' I des took me for *me,* an' I said:

* Banket, used for *sidewalk* in New Orleans.

"'Eena, meena, mina, mo,
Cracka feena, fina, fo,
Omanoocha, popatoocha,
Ring, ding, dang, do!'

an', of co'se, you bein' de onliest lady in de game, I give you de start—at de sycamo'-tree—but—but *I 'm it!* An' dat means I 'm boun' to *lead off*. Ef I had acted de coward, an' named myself fust, behin' yo' back, *you 'd* 'a' been it—an' I 'd 'a' had to come back an' put down deze bundles an' go to you for orders. But I 'm my own man now, an' I mus' be up an' gittin'. Dey ain't no time to lose. Dat lion gate—!"

He hesitated here, and glanced at the woman, and his voice betrayed a lowering of tone while he added:

"'T ain't dat I 'd class you wid stone beases—'t ain't dat—but seem, some way, dat *dem rock lions is callin' me,* an' I

bleeged to go. An' dat deef ole lady, maybe she mought be on de lookout for me—ef she been prayin' wid faith for a handy little boy."

Sarah's fond eyes passed lovingly over his little figure while, bundle in hand to go forth into the great world and yet frankly confessing his temptation to remain with her, he so manfully confided his plans.

"Dat 's so," she said, simply, when he had done. "Dat 's so, an' ef you feels a call to go, yo' Aunt Sarah would n't stop you. But dem shoes—! I 'd hate to see you clap de knocker on dat high gate twix' dem two lions wid dem shoes on. Dey ain't even to say fellers, is dey?—not perzacly."

Even while she was speaking she had turned away, and in a moment George was sitting down while she tried upon his

feet a somewhat mouldy pair of half-worn brogans.

"Ef deze 'll fit yo' foots, dey could be polished up, an' dat lion-lady, she would n't take no further notice. Dey war n't quite fit for him to wear to his own fun'al—not wid de new half soles off de ground—so I put 'em away till some needy man mought claim 'em."

The shoes proved a most satisfactory fit—that is, they "went on" and "did n't pinch," and, indeed, when a stiff wad of paper in them had given their toes a sort of lift, George's delight was complete.

"Tell you what, a man could cut curves in deze!" he exclaimed, while he stepped out bravely. "Dey calls for manners an' behavior—an' a walkin'-cane would n't faze 'em, nuther. But I sho' does wush 't I had some sort o' private hat, 'stid o' dis heah soljer-cap.

Co'se, I *likes* it, but, right now, wid deze mixed clo'es, seem like it locations all my bravery in my head."

"How 'll dis one do?" Sarah brought down upon his head, even while she spoke, out of nowhere, apparently, a white straw, a bit frazzled in the brim, but with plenty of starch and "spunk" in it.

George surveyed himself in most leisurely fashion before delivering himself upon the hat, and he had even tested it at several angles upon his head, when he finally discarded it.

Then, while he replaced the old cap and pulled its visor low over his eyes, he remarked:

"Thanky, ma'am, but I reckon dis cap 'll do, after all. Hit don't call for much, sence its braid is to'e off, an' dat straw—you see, I *never likes to fo'ce de season.*"

CHAPTER VI

BUTTONS AND BRAVERY

IT was about ten o'clock—the front edge of the morning after breakfast to those who sleep along Prytania Street—when George finally started out.

There had been a full understanding with Sarah that he should return to her whenever he would, until he should have found an accepted abiding-place, and with this comfortable arrangement, he stepped quite bravely, feeling sure of the direction in which the lions slept in stone; but when he had several times lost his bearings and been constrained to return, for their recovery, to a certain church cor-

ner, at the end of what he mentally called "Sarah Street," he suddenly seemed to realize its open vestibule as an invitation, and, turning into the gate, he mounted the steps, discovered a side door accidentally left unlocked, and, going quite into the church, he proceeded to discuss the generous meal, which, no doubt, cleared his mind while it sustained his body.

When finally his place was marked only by bits of paper and egg shell—so familiar both in the trail of the wayfarer—George was traveling with good speed and courage in the real direction of the guarded gate.

No one ever knew what he said to the old lady within the coveted door that morning, but notwithstanding our being several accounts short, as the servants were sent away during the interview,

certain it is that two faces were wreathed in smiles, his and his employer's, when he went out, promising to be on hand early next day.

The sun was still high when George's slim and elongated shadow, extending for some yards ahead of him, showed his coming to Sarah, as it lay over her washing on the grass beyond her tubs.

She had welcomed this forerunner of her own boy in the old days, and it had been her habit, as soon as she recognized it, to wipe her hands upon her apron and to await him in the front door. And so she did now—going through her cabin.

"Hello! How comes it on wid my little man to-day?"

It was exactly her old greeting, but she did not realize it.

"I 'm a *lion man!* Dat 's huccome I

comes on!'' George replied, as he met her proudly, while he put his bundle into her extended hand—the hand which had received the school-books of the other—a year ago.

''Yas 'm!'' he added, proudly, fanning with his cap. ''An' I 'm gwine on duty at ten o'clock to-morrer—an' I gwine have a nuniform, too—two nuniforms, for dat matter—Sunday an' week-day—all wid buttons an' bravery on 'em! Dey done tuck an' tuck my measurements a'ready—an' de measure-man, he don't live at de house. I went to him wid a order-ticket—an' he lets on dat I holds myself *fine!*'' At this the boy threw back his shoulder, bracing himself like a West Point plebe on parade. Then, feeling possibly that the next assertion needed some apology, he added:

''I hope I ain't tol' no lie, but when

she axed me 'bout my fam'ly, I say I stayed wid my Aunt Sarah, but when she axed me 'Sarah *what?*' I des happened to glimpse de lions' tails f'om her winder, an' I say, I say:

"'Lions looks mo' brave *befo'* 'n dey does *behind*—don't dey?' An' she des seemed to glance at 'em, too, an' she never quizzed me no mo' 'bout yo' name."

"But sposen she had, boy, what would you 'a' said?"

George thought a moment.

"I—I don't know, ma'am, ezzacly. I reckon maybe I 'd 'a' said som'h'n' about gyardenin'—or horses—or birds. She would n't 'a' cotched me, nohow—not dat easy. But you better learn me all yo' full entitlements to-night, please, ma'am. She mought ax me ag'in. An' besides dat, ef you sesso, of co'se, I gwine

come 'home' heah when I gits my days off—or gits sick. An', of co'se, I 'll lif' tubs or plant yo' gyarden when I comes—an' you know *reel* aunts, dey keeps boys' wages for 'em, an' uses what po'-tion dey needs, an' —an'—all sich as dat. You see, I ain't got no folks—*lessen you 'll be 'em.* Of co'se, dey 's Aunt Ca'line, but she ain't even a desirous aunt—an' she 's got her own supply."

"*I is 'em, a'ready!*" said the happy woman, and while she took the pin from his cravat and held it between her teeth, she said, "Hain't we been each other's families ever sence I see yo' little legs danglin' on de front bench yisterday? An' as for de 'Aunt Sarah' part, you know dat ain't no sin, caze everybody dat 's decent enough to say it calls me dat. But for my entitlements—slip off yo' coat, boy, and lay up dis cravat—I

say for my entitlements, I 'm Mis' Sarah Alviry Sparrer. Everybody in chu'ch calls me 'Sis Sparrer.' "

George giggled.

"I would n't 'a' went far wrong ef dey 'd quizzed me for yo' name, an' I 'd skirted in an' remarked about sparrers, would I? I sho' won't forgit *dat* name."

"Hit 's a name dat 'll never shame you, man."

"Yas, so I see," said the boy.

"You mighty keen-eyed ef you see dat, boy. How you see it, I like to know?"

For answer George pointed to a framed document headed with a picture of bride and groom, hanging over the mantel.

"I got one des like dat o' my gran'ma an' gran'pa—an' he allus tol' me to hold fas' by sech as dat ef I ever come acrost it—'mongst my color. We all been

church widders in my fam'ly. I 'll fetch mine over an' hang it up."

Sarah seemed almost unduly amused at this.

"You 's a great lookin' widder, I must say!" she fairly roared.

"I mean my folks is—an' I see you 's de same."

"Yas, boy; dat 's right. We all been raised to marry an' christen an' bury in church—an' I 'm proud to see dat you been riz de same way. We has papers fo' all our performances."

"Me, too," said George, "so far as I 'm gone along. I got my christenin' city*fic*ate—but as to marryin' an' dyin' —I ain't in no hurry. I 'm thinkin' mo' o' what 's makin' dat pot-top dance de way it do. I 's hongry, Aunt Sarah. Dis heah waistcoat, hit 's fairly wrinkled. I wants to eat til' it fits."

"I know you does—an' hit 's yo' name in dat pot dat makes it dance de way it do. I hoped to have my man set down wid me for supper."

"An' me, too. I was so fear'd de trumpet-lady 'd comman' me to stay dar right along, dat when she murmured out, 'to-morrer,' I purty nigh giggled. You know it 'd be hard to sass into a yeah-trumpet—or to conterdict it."

CHAPTER VII

ANGELS IN THE AIR

IT was nine o'clock—past bedtime for such as Sarah and George—and the latter's lessening share of the conversation had for some time been punctuated with nods, when Sarah remarked, sleepily:

"I notice de ole clock is broke down on de strike." She rose, and began winding "the strike," which had failed on the sixth hour, and when it began to ring out faithfully, three more, George chuckled, quite awake now over the interesting fact.

"Seems funny how a clock can remem-

ber—don't it?" he laughed. "It owed you three strikes, an' it paid its debt befo' it done anything else."

"Yas," Sarah repeated; "it pays—but I had to dun it befo' it settled up dis time. Dat was my fault, dough. I did n't do it jestice last time I wound it up. Hit pays what you gives it. Dat 's all. Dat 's de diffe'nce betwix man-made machinery an' de Lord's handi-work. De human heart is His work—an' it 's—it 's altogether diffe'nt."

She took her seat now, and, turning to the boy, she said:

"For ninstance, now, look at you an' me. I ain't nuver even to say knowed you was alive, untel yisterday—an' you did n't suspicion I was in de land o' de livin'—an' yit, when yo' thin legs got tired, a little in'ard voice, so low it nuver got up to yo' ears, but jes' spoke to yo'

heart, it say: 'Go an' set down on dat ole bench under the chiny-trees, man. Dey 's angels in de air down dar—an' when you come, dey 'll descen' down to de ole black 'oman inside, an' dey 'll tell her an' her heart 'll rebound—an' she 'll go out an' fetch you in an' yield you her bosom's comfort.' "

"Did you hear de angels when I come, Aunt Sarah?" he asked, in a half whisper.

"Not wid my out'ard ears—no, son. Dey did n't haf to mo 'n let my heart know—an' hit led me to you. I went de way my heart led—same as you come."

"I knowed *som'h'n'* led me to turn dis way, caze hit was des de contrariwise o' de way I was lookin' to go. Yas, an' like you say, too, angels or som'h'n' must o' gimme courage, caze whilst I felt all over me kind o' goose-skin wid

homesickness when I was talkin' to de deef lady, I up an' told her, brave as a live lion, dat I was 'bleeged to git aroun' to see my Aunt Sarah twice-t a week, at de least figgur. I tol' 'er dat, Aunt Sarah, on de count o' de way you totes yo' lef' hip sometimes when you makes a sudden turn. A aunt dat makes dat sort o' motion in her easy work might be tookin' sick any day—an' ef she got air nephew or step-nephew, even, dat 's fitten to *be* had, he 'd feel obleeged to git aroun' an' see how she come on every few days. Den she could even leave a heavy tub 'g'inst his comin'. So, I said twice-t a week—*ef not oftener*. An' I said I laid off to pay her part o' my wages, too."

Sarah's face grew pretty serious.

"Huccome you had de gall to tell her dat, boy?"

"'Caze I ain't no beggar, dat 's why. An' I ain't no orphaned, nuther. I got a mammy an' a daddy, no matter whar dey is. Gran'daddy, he tol' me dat a grave was a honor'ble thing to live by, but I wants *live* kin-folks, an' somebody wha' knows manners and behavior. Ef I was to hire out in dat deef ole lady's house, wid no colored kin to rub off a pain for me, I 'd seem like one o' doze ole conterband niggers we hear tell about. Gran'daddy, lookin' down at me, why, he 'd be 'shamed to name my name in heaven."

"All dat 's jes' what I was startin' to say," answered Sarah. "I say it 's hard to b'lieve dat yo' thin little legs only interduced me to you 'istiddy, an' I 'm so tuck up wid you dat I ain't gwine let you take dat place in de lion's gate tell I goes up myself an' talks to de lady. An' I 'll

let her see you ain't no rough and tumble, nuther. I 'll put on my black alapaca frock an' my beaded dolman cape. It 's a leetle tight round de arms sence I growed into flesh, but it stands for times an' seasons—an' so do my bonnet wid de curtain in de back an' de roses an' grapes in front. Quality is quality, an' it don't haf to be dated. She 'll make terms, as dey say, wid my outfit, ef she 's short-sighted, whilst she mought spurn me ef she seen me in dis check ap'on an' plaid hankcher. New things is cheap.

"You see, ef you gwine be my boy—an', of co'se, either you *is* or you *ain't*—she 'll see I nuver 'lows none o' my family to live out p'omiskyus. But, of co'se, ef I 'm satisfied de way things looks, you kin go in a few days, time I gits you fitted out. You needs night-shirts an' mendin' an' a few every-day clo'es—

to play in. Dey 'll be days when you 'll be boun' to mud up de lions jes' caze dey won't take dey eyes off 'n you. Boy chillen, dey ap' to have dem spells—but don't give in to 'em mo 'n you haf to. I 'll fix it all up for yer, but don't you dast to git up to-morrer mornin' tel yo' Aunt Sarah calls you. Den she 'll be back f'om de negosuatioms at de lion gate. Come on, now. Say yo' 'Now I lay me—' and git to bed."

George's grin, as he crossed the floor, seemed to obscure all the rest of him. It was such rest to be controlled—to *belong* so soon again to somebody of requirements and of proud standards.

The child was pathetically excited and mischievous, as was betrayed by his asking, even as he knelt:

"What would you do ef I was to sass you—an' not mind?"

The very absurdity of his question amused him so that he impulsively threw his arms about the woman's neck. And while she hugged him, much as she had hugged her own boy, she answered, with mischief in her eyes:

"I 'd cut a peach switch an' *whup you good*—dat 's what I 'd do," at which poor George hugged her all the harder.

"An' I 'd need it, too!" he chuckled, proudly. "You 'd be servin' me des like all de mammies does owdacious boys. —mammies or keer-takin' aunts. But you need n't tek time to hunt no peach switch. You can tek dat bag-strop to me—ef I needs it—but I ain't nuver gwine need it, lessen I breaks out in a fresh place, unbeknowinst to myself."

No more heart-whole and submissive grandson, son, or nephew ever repeated a simple prayer, or sank into happy

slumber upon a more downy bed of confiding love than did the boy George, when, as Sarah put it, "he sounded his amen an' let go of her neck," when she led him to bed and tucked the "mosquito bar" about him.

CHAPTER VIII

SIDE-CURLS AND OLD-TIME BEHAVIOR

AND when he waked in the morning to find Ponto, the bob-tailed mongrel whom Sarah had always bade him "keep clair of," sniffing at him outside the net, he became instantly guilty of his first technical disobedience. It was only technical, however, as Ponto had told him in good dog language, which nearly all black boys, and many white ones, know, that while Sarah was a good mistress, she did n't know everything—especially about beasts and friendships—and boys.

And so, although he said, to maintain

his position of superiority, "You better go back to yo' barrel, Ponto—an' let yo' marster git up an' dress," he immediately untucked the netting, and while the dog licked his arm, he added:

"Ef Aunt Sarah comes an' 'scivers you heah, she 'll whup us bofe good—she sho' will."

It was really amusing—the pleasure George took in thinking of Sarah's exercising even this supreme authority over him.

All through the old days, while his grandfather and he had roughed it variously, his outside contacts had been with children who got candy and blows, according to circumstances—clean, mended clothes one minute and whippings for soiling or tearing them the next.

The whipping had somehow seemed the one indisputable guarantee of privi-

lege and protection. It was a sort of nether-part of "belonging."

That was why he grinned so at the thought, and why, when he finally heard Sarah's step at the door, he shouted, laughing:

"Time to be gittin' up—an' I *is* too!"

"Yas, I should say so—ef you ain't, you better! And ef you know which side yo' bread 's buttered on, you 'll make haste, too—ef you wants to hold yo' place!"

"Hold what?" George had sprung out of bed at the word.

"I say, ef you 'spects to lasso dem lions from behind, you better hurry up an' git! I done tried all my argimints wid 'er. I shot 'em good as I could into dat ear-trumpet, but it got me so frustrated part o' de time, when I was callin' fo'th my best speech I was

treadin' on de hose—an' so I nuver tried to say it all over.

"You done gone an' got de ole lady so hoodooed dat dey ain't no reason in 'er. She 'lowed dat she did n't want no home-made clo'es nor nothin', *nothin' but de boy*—an' she wanted him cash down.

"But she 's all right, settin' up dar wid side-curls an' ole-time behavior—why, she even axed me to set down, an' p'inted to one o' deze criss-cross stitched bottomans, an' I 'clare, I 'm so heavy an' I was studyin' how de coxcomb on it was raised up like reel bloom dat I come down on it sort o' bias an' sudden, an' de rollers must 'a' been fresh greased. Anyhow, when I let down my heft, de whole business shot 'crost de room, an' de speakin'-hose, why, hit fell halfway betwixt us. I tell you, boy, you got to mind yo' p's an' q's quite a while, to mek

up for de way yo' Aunt Sarah skated crost dat waxed flo'. I tell you, the bead cape did n't count for nothin' Hit jes' went along wid de rest o' me."

George rolled on the floor with mirth over the ludicrous experience of the really dignified woman who so calmly confessed her embarrassment.

"But what did you do, Aunt Sarah, when yo' han'-car come to a stan'still?" he shrieked.

"Why, I jes' lived up to my cape an' my raisin'—an' I riz up an' courtesied todes de lady, walked back and picked up de talkin'-tube, an' I say into it: "All right, ma'am—please, ma'am—thanky, ma'am—he 'll be heah quick as I kin git back an' see him dressed." An' nair one of us even so much as looked todes de roller-seat. Tell de trufe, I ain't *sho'* she seen me make de

trip, caze jes' as I started, a black gal come in to speak to her, an' ef she did n't see me, she could n't *hear* me, I *know*. But come on, now, an' lemme put you th'ough yo' paces. What 's dat dog doin', jumpin' over de bed? Is you been teachin' him tricks?"

"Yas 'm. I teached him *dat, easy*. I des done it once-t—an' he follered along. Watch me, now! Come along, Ponto!"

At this, George, after quickly taking his place on the floor, made a brave high plunge over the bed, the dog following closely on his heels.

Instead of Sarah's objecting, as would have been only consistent with proper discipline, she dropped into a chair, screaming with laughter.

And while she took off her cape and untied her bonnet strings, she said:

"I sho' is sorry you 's gwine to live

out. I sho' is—caze a child's noise, hit 's refreshment in de house. But hurry and dress now, an' come to me. I got to feed you an' drill you, too."

When presently the boy presented himself at table, Sarah hurriedly placed his food before him.

"Eat now an' chew to-morrer," she said, playfully, "an' come tek yo' manners-lesson. You can be p'omoted all yo' life an' you 'll sca'cely git to de place whar you 'll have to eat wid manners. Nigger table-behavior consis'es in watchin' white folks whilst dey eat easy an' talk loud—wid style. To know how to stan' behin' a cheer an' flap a fly-fan—when dey *is* a fly-fan—or to—"

"Fly-fans ain't in it for reel granjer," George interrupted. "Gran'pa, he done showed me how to take my stan' —des dis way!"

He rose and placed himself back of his own chair—one hand over another, resting on its top edge.

"But dat ain't no trouble. De greatest trouble for a lively boy is to ac' deef and dumb. No matter how funny stories is, no fus'-class waiter is allowed to blink. I knowed a mighty peart black boy once-t, wha' went to a place on trial, an' he had it purty nigh solid when one day somebody tol' a story dat tickled him so dat he giggled all over a omelet-soup-plate—an' I tell you dat one giggle, hit landed him in de street."

"But I ain't afeerd o' dat," interrupted Sarah, "not wid you. Ef yo' gran'pa walked behin' his young mistus gwine to church, an' toted her book an' made his salutatioms, de way you say he done, hit 's boun' to tell in yo' blood."

"Yas, it mought tell—but I don't depend on dat. I nuver goes in to wait on no ticklish company but I totes a long pin. I sticks it under my sleeve on de right side, an' ef any talk gits de better of me, I des slips it up an' jabs it in—close to my arm. Dey say dat 's a safe place. Dey ain't no hearts or livers or nothin' set up in yo' right arm-crotch to suicide you wid.

"I 's waited on tables once-t in a while, when dey 'd be a hand short, whar gran'pa 'd be sawin' wood, an' once-t dey was des startin' a turrible story 'bout a Kentucky colonel, an' I knowed de end of it, an' knowed I could n't stand it, an' I was des startin' 'round wid the *fust* champagne co'se—*every* glass to fill an' no side-trackin', so you know what I done?

"I jabbed my pin in when I started

out, an' I tell you, when de end o' story hove in sight, I started to handle de bottle so as to work de pin, an' when I got back into de pantry, I tell you I had two fus'-class vaccinatioms on my arm. You see, I worked her up an' th'ough—but you bet I nuver laughed. I did n't even feel like it, an' yit, ef I was to hear dat story now, wid no legal objections like a hat-pin to spile my fun, I 'd suffer turrible an' maybe lose a button."

"I should think a boy smart as you is could save his manners, even ef he had to bite his lip."

"Yas, an' so I could—*ef I could reach it in time,* but dat ain't safe, not for me. My funny-bone lifts my top lip out o' reach at de fust shock, an', besides, one *grin* in a lady's dinin'-room is counted a crime—in special ef it 's red an' black an' dead-white—an' a yard long at dat,

like mine is. A Irish grin, why, dat 's diff'ent. Half de time you can't tell whether dey grinnin' or not."

"Yas, dat 's so," acquiesced Sarah. "But I ain't afeerd o' my man. But we mus' git up some yether contraption besides dem long pins. I 'd be havin' de col' shivers every day, 'bout dinner-time, jes' 'thinkin' maybe—"

"You nee'n't to worry about dat, Aunt Sarah. I ain't sho' whether I 'll haf to wait on de dinner-table or not, but ef I does I reckon de ole lady an' de ear-trumpet an' me 'll be able to hold in all de fun dey is—widout no pins. But I wants a good strong one to take along wid me caze she done a'ready put sev'ral questions to me, an' I know I 'm ap' to git in trouble. For one thing, she says she loves to listen at Testament-readin', an' she axed me could I do it, an', of

co'se, I say, 'Yas, ma'am, I 'd try'; but befo' gracious, ef she axes me to spell out de gorspils, an' maybe sing or even pray into dat ear-trumpet befo' I gits used to it, I tell you, Aunt Sarah, dat shiny-top bonnet-pin you des' taken out o' yo' bonnet won't be any too long for me."

CHAPTER IX

GEORGE SEES A VISION

GEORGE entered upon his service within the gate of his dreams with a high head and a brave heart.

There was so much to satisfy his ambition in the stately old home and its atmosphere of refinement that, for some days, his mind was so filled that he quite forgot to miss the young dream-lady with curls who played upon a gilt harp, and whom it had been his most cherished ambition to follow about her grounds, waiting and serving, even as his grandfather had done in the old time.

Indeed, having undertaken his duties

here without this factor, he might practically have forgotten it for all time, had he not one day come suddenly upon a startling apparition of just such a personage.

It confronted him in the far end of a dusky back parlor, seldom opened now. Strolling aimlessly, late one afternoon, into the great rooms, he suddenly saw, standing before him, a beautiful girl, in the evening dress so commonly worn in the dusk in early Virginia days. She seemed to be strolling from a great old house through an avenue of trees, her faithful dog at her left, while a resplendent black serving boy in Continental dress at the other side bore her book in his arms—all pride and attention.

The great painting probably represented the "missy" of the manor going down to the arbor in the lower garden,

where all the slave-children came to sing on Sunday afternoons, and she led them —even sometimes accompanying them on her harp.

The picture caught the sunset rays with such effect that the small boy, seeing it in all its grandeur for the first time, not only weirdly illuminated but seeming actually to take motion from the play of leaves in shadow over it, stopped suddenly and, touching his forehead in salutation and scraping his foot, began to gasp something, when a whiff of wind blew a dry magnolia leaf through the window. The leaf seemed to graze the very skirts of the lady, when it was intercepted by the strings of a *real gilt harp,* which stood beneath the portrait.

Not only did the frightened boy see the wonderful vision, but he actually heard the rustle of the dry leaf, and it took but

a little pardonable imagination to make him declare, as he did afterward, that he had "heerd de swish o' de silk dress an' smelt de smell o' ole cologne." The delicate aroma of a dry magnolia blossom is quite suggestive enough of a subtle offering of time to deceive greater minds than George's and under less excitement.

At the episode of the leaf, the boy turned in terror and, with a faint shriek, fled from the room—and that part of the house was for him, afterward, as a haunted spot.

He could not mention the occurrence to the other servants, and certainly it was not a thing for him to speak into the ear-trumpet of his benefactress—surely, not yet, at least. And for this last reticence there was a most astonishing reason—a reason which sent the boy into

quiet nooks, for undisturbed thinking, in the garden when he would otherwise have been rocking on a "lion-saddle," or taking bareback rides, or maybe even sweeping up the leaves along the walks between the flower-beds.

His immediate recognition of the picture as corresponding with the story of the old man, his grandfather—a picture which he firmly believed to have been a spiritual presentment—would have passed into variable shape and become bedimmed by time, but for the fact which suddenly dawned upon him that he had, even here in his little new trunk, wrapped with a few other treasures, a photograph which corresponded in every detail with the vision, as he remembered it in its startling revelation of beauty which far exceeded even his imagination.

One reason why he liked to go into

lonely places to think was that in such he felt free to take out this old picture and to "study over it."

He knew that the little black boy in it was his grandfather—and that the lady was the young mistress whom he had honored all his days.

"But why dey all showed up to me dat day—even to the gol' harp which I on'y knows by hearsay—dat 's too much for me! Dey 's a mericle done taken place behin' deze lion-tails—an' I 'm in it, some way."

So he would talk over the picture, every time weakly resolving to go back into the dim rooms behind the heavy curtains, not expecting to find the visitants there, for, of course, they would have gone long ago, but just to see how they came and went, for certainly some part of the place must have been accidentally

left open. Of course, he knew that chimneys would serve, or chinks in the wall,—but he could not understand how the young lady's gown could have come through so—without a crinkle.

Round and round the house he would go, counting windows and chimney-tops, trying to locate the vision against some fortunate time of opportunity and courage. He had had both, but they had never come together.

The curtains were sometimes drawn aside in the parlors, and on bright days, too, when one should be brave; but at such times, he always found himself "on the far side of the house," frightened at the bare possibility of a temptation to investigate the mystery.

It was generally about midnight, when all the doors were locked, that he felt "brave as a live lion"—then, or while

he rode as footman with the old lady in her daily drives, an indulgence which she occasionally granted as a reward of good behavior.

Daily familiarity with the ear-trumpet into which he said spelling and reading lessons, and after a while had even learned to repeat his answers from the "children's shorter catechism," had long ago robbed it of all terror to him.

George got along finely in his position for the space of nearly a year.

He had confided to Sarah, after a long time of secret suffering through fear, the story of the "haunt" which had come to him in one of the great rooms. He had not shown her the photograph because of simple pride. It was old—unframed—cheap-looking. The apparition as against a word picture, which is in a way unlimited, was, he felt, far more un-

usual and impressive. Sarah was superstitious enough to have fallen in with any plausible story of the supernatural, but her real opinion in this case was that the overcharged mind of an excited child long under the spell of a special picture of life—had simply found space and setting in the great house for his imaginings, and she frankly told him so—in her own way, of course.

"Anything 'll come an' stand befo' you ef you wanders in dimness—an' keeps a-thinkin' too free—specially ef you lives high an' don't take good spring brews. I done made you a lot o' cinnamon-root tea, an' ef you 'll drink some every night an' mornin', dey won't no ha'nts bother you."

This was wholesome treatment, no doubt, but while he did not question it—he even drank the nice tea—the boy

knew better than to attribute his vision to any physical cause.

Of course, there were lonely and otherwise trying times for him, and, even while sitting bravely upon the cold back of one of the lions, he often longed for the freedom of the ragged fellows of his own age who passed the gate.

There was a great dog on the place—a dog that lived in friendly enough relations with the boy—an ancient collie of superior manners and a particularly impressive tail. George liked the old fellow, who answered to the name of Chaucer, and, indeed, after vainly trying to teach him a few gentle tricks, George fell back upon a single success, which afforded mild amusement to the other servants, and was finally brought to the front yard, where it was received by a number of guests with fine applause—and even a

considerable return to the showman, who was bidden to "pass the hat."

The trick, which really never failed, was simply to throw the dog a bone, at the moment calling, "Chaw, sir!"

And Chaucer always "chawed."

CHAPTER X

THE YOUNG LADY OF THE GOLD HARP

ALTHOUGH George, on the whole, rejoiced in the good fortune which had given him so much—for he frankly assured Sarah that he had "sho' touched de top-notch," there were nights when the white iron bed in the little room near that of "ole Mis' "—so he had finally learned to call her—was a chill and lonely place. There were stomach-ache times, too, when he positively yearned for the only maternal touch he had ever known.

And yet, when he went "home"—to Sarah—each week, he had words of

praise and pride only for her as to his happiness and well-being. Kind words for her, too, while he pressed upon her a goodly share of his slowly increasing wages.

On one or two of their visits, the boy found Sarah somewhat lame, though uncomplaining, beyond her habit of being, more or less, "po'ly, thank God!" and it worried him. He began to doubt the righteousness of his life, and, indeed, he was trying to decide at least to take the old lady, his benefactress, into his confidence in the matter, when something unusual happened.

His lady having company, George had slipped away to his favorite haunt, beside a lily-pond within the grounds, over which a weeping-willow threw its veil. Sitting here upon the grass against the tree-trunk, his broom lying idle beside

him, he took out his old photograph, and in a moment he was so far back in wonder that a light step at his side gave him first warning that his old mistress was approaching.

"Let me see it. What have you there, George?" she said, calmly. Then, seeing the boy's embarrassment, she added: "Let me see it." As she spoke, she slowly seated herself upon the iron bench which George had eschewed for his better seat on the grass, and then, arranging her ear-trumpet on her lap, and having adjusted her glasses, she took the photograph from the boy's hand.

To say that she suddenly turned very white and was in actual danger of falling is but a feeble description of its effect upon her when she had given the picture a single glance.

"Wh—wh—?"

It was vain to try to speak, and when she essayed to fix her trumpet in her ear, her hand trembled so that she could not, but George, brought suddenly to intelligent action by her distress, deftly placed the trumpet as it belonged, and, adjusting the mouthpiece to his lips, said, clearly:

"Dat 's des my gran'pa's picture—dat little black boy, to one side."

His hearer looked at him, as one peering into a mist, but presently she said, as if really *distrait:*

"What did you say?"

"I say dat I keeps dis caze my gran'pa, he lef' it to me. De little black boy in it—*dat 's him*—leastways, it was when it was took."

"Sit down here—beside me—boy. I have much to say to you. Who—who—who is the lady in this picture?"

"Oh, I knows who she is. She was his mistus. He callt her 'Mis' Genevieve.' Does you know her?"

For answer, she could only lay her thin, blue-white hand upon the boy's knee.

But presently, closing her eyes, she said, slowly:

"She—was—my—mother. Wh—why have you not told me all this before?"

"Lordy, mistus! I ain't knowed it tel' dis minute."

The child began to cry.

"I knowed—I knowed dey was som-'h'n' nother mighty peculius about dis house—caze dem rock lions use to seem to call to me all de time—an' I done had—I done had a vision, too—yas 'm, I is!"

Wiping her glasses, and then her eyes, the old lady had taken the trumpet into her hand.

"What vision have you had, George, boy—be careful about these things. I may have not to believe you—in this."

"Yas 'm, I know 'm—but you 'll *haf* to b'lieve me when I tell you all about it, you sho will, ole mis'.

"You see, dey ain't no harp in dis picture, don't yer? Well, Mis' Genevieve, she used to play on a gol' harp—gran'pa sesso, an' he ain't no liar—an', well, all I got to say is, she come to me one night when the sun was sca'cely down—her an' gran'pa an' dat same dorg—in one o' yo' granjer-rooms, mongst dem statues an' things. I know dat dog's name, too. She name 'Consolation'—"

"Yes—she was Chaucer's great-grandmother. We always kept her beautiful pups."

"What you say, mistus? Look like I 'm way back yonder, lost in some kind

o' cu'yers gyarden, wid—wid—wid our folks—but I misses—I misses my *ole* gran'pa."

Great, noble tears bleared the old lady's glasses as she took the boy's free hand firmly in hers while she said:

"Yes, and so you are, George—indeed, you are back among your folks—we are your people, in truth. My blessed mother—she died in all her youth and beauty, much as you see her in this picture—bequeathed his freedom and a little income to your grandfather, and he studied and became a preacher, did n't he?"

"Yas 'm, but he got de slow consumption, an' dat turned him into a woodsawyer. My daddy was snakebit, getherin' berries, an', well—I don't know much 'bout my mammy. Gran'pa say she had foreign ways, so she went trav-

elin'—but my *gran'pa*—I wush 't you could 'a' seen him—an' heerd 'im talk. He use' to say he could preach Christ, hoa'se as he was, acrost a saw-horse to anybody at de wood-pile wid time to listen, ef he did haf to leave de pulpit—an' I tell you, mistus, he could, too. An' he 's in heaven now, lessen somebody tol' Gord lies on 'im. An' I don't b'lieve Gord' d listen to 'em.

"But he always warned me dat my folks belonged to de quality—an' not for me to tek up wid no secon'-rates—an' I would n't, nuther."

CHAPTER XI

A BOY GRANDFATHER

IT was about eight o'clock—just after dinner—when the old lady called George to her. She had bade the maid light up the parlor-side of the house.

When the boy came to her, she said:

"I am going to take you in to where you saw your vision, George, and I am sure the visit will give you pleasure and pride, too.

"Your photograph is one of a small number which were taken from a large painting, when it was done. Now, you will see my beautiful young mother, not half my present age, for I am nearly

sixty. You will see her and your grandfather while he was about your size—all painted in color and—"

"But what about de harp?" George was fairly panting with excitement.

"That is there, too; but come. Don't be in a hurry to understand everything. Come and see."

The boy was very small, and, half-affrighted by the great experience of the moment, he looked appealingly into the old lady's face.

For answer, she took his hand and, smiling, led him in.

The lights placed as best to exhibit the beautiful painting were all lit, and, indeed, to more discerning eyes than poor George's, the revelation would have been extremely beautiful and impressive, even without its association.

"Here is the best place to sit." She

drew a low stool and putting him upon it, seated herself near.

"Now," she said, after a pause, "what about the vision, little boy?"

But he could not answer. He had begun to cry. But presently he whimpered:

"Ef only gran'pa could be lookin' down at us dis minute, would n't he feel biggoty? Seein' you an' me together!"

"Maybe he can look down. I often feel that mother sees me when I 'm here. It is a sweet place to come."

"Yas 'm, it sho' is!" said George, into the trumpet, and then suddenly he began to laugh beyond control, but when, finally fearing excessive nervousness for the child, the mistress suggested their going out, he conquered the mirth which had suddenly surprised himself, enough to explain:

"I can't git over de set o' gran'-daddy's dude coat-tails an' de broad grin on 'im. He sho' was one proud little nigger. A man like dat could easy *be* a Christmas gif'."

"So you know how that happened?"

And then, sitting here before the proof of all his claim, the boy told the whole story of his futile efforts to "give himself away" as a Christmas gift to some lady who played on a harp, in emulation of the boy so effectively pictured before him.

This, of course, led easily to the story of Sarah and of his present uneasiness concerning her. Then of his resolve that, since she had thought enough of him to adopt him in the day of his poverty and helplessness, he felt the time had come when he ought "in a manner to adopt her," actually going to live with

her, to help her with his strong hands as well as with such contribution in money as he could easily earn.

"Let us go now, and we can talk this all over to-morrow," said the mistress, rising.

"Befo' we goes, please, ma'am, may I walk up an' pass my han' over de gol' harp?" he asked, timidly.

"Certainly, go." It came with quavering voice.

He was beyond the range of the ear-trumpet now, and so, when he had felt along the gilt edges, and even run his fingers noiselessly over the strings, he passed from the harp to the painting. Extending his fingers near it, he looked back over his shoulder, questioningly.

"May I touch it?" eyes and fingers said, and when a nod had answered them,

the boy, advancing timidly, raised his hand and petted the dog about the neck; then drawing down his fingers, he touched the shimmering gown of the lady, touched it gingerly here and there, half caressingly but yet fearing to harm it.

And now, moving the hand further along, he placed it bravely upon the breast of the boy—his grandfather—over both the painted hands which held the painted prayer-book.

This last was evidently too great a strain upon his young emotions, and when he had felt the hands—even fondly laying both his own upon them—he suddenly began to shriek aloud in a veritable agony of passion:

"*Gran'pa! Gran'pa! I 'm come!* Does you reco'nize me, gran'pa? Heah yo' boy! An' I 'M ALL RIGHT! I DONE FOUN' DE FOLKS!"

A kind hand drew the child away, and as he passed out, it held him firmly while a tender voice said:

"Sh! Don't cry, child—don't cry!" Her own handkerchief was wet, but she was used to control. "Don't expect too much. We may seem to see our loved ones again in such sweet pictures as this, but they may not come to us. If we are good and faithful, some day we may go to them. Come, boy."

CHAPTER XII

HOW IT ALL CAME OUT

PERHAPS it was the proudest day in Sarah's life when the carriage, with liveried attendants, drove up to her door on the day following the events related in the last chapter.

To see again the often-quoted "Aunt Sarah," and to make "proper provision" for her comfort was one of the first impulses of George's "folks"—otherwise, his single inherited mistress.

There was everything to attract the intelligent and the far-seeing guest, who accepted the chair, hospitably wiped with the hostess's apron before it was

offered, and although the gentle woman had gone to her charged with kindly feeling and a resolve to reach out a hand to her, it was very soon apparent that the guest's attitude would be less an extension of the hand than a drawing of its beneficiary to her.

Sarah was no object of charity. There were snow-white garments piled in her cabin, heaped upon a pine table scoured to an almost artificial whiteness. The little back yard was as clean as the linen bleaching upon its clover.

Sarah, herself, was good to see—in her immaculate dress and her good humor.

It all came very suddenly to her—the news of the honor which had come to the boy of her adoption—the verification of his every claim by the rattling equipage which stood actually in sight of the whole

street at her door. She was a woman of few words, but, as are such, sometimes, she was one who bore herself with a simple, unconscious grace on trying occasions.

She was "proud and delighted" at the boy's good fortune. She appreciated the great lady's offer to take her into her service—giving her what seemed munificent wages, with a cabin, big enough for herself and the boy of her adoption, in a corner of the square occupied by the home—a bleaching-plot—a front-back gate, all her own—no end of things.

Still the woman, bending her head in acknowledgment all the while, could not be brought in this first interview to agree to relinquish an intangible and remote but cherished commodity, which she called "her freedom."

"You sho' is payin' me a great com-

pliment, ma'am—you sho' is,'' she said, among other forms of protest, or objection, ''caze I mought turn out bad, for all you knows; but hit ain't dat.

''I kin set down in my front do' an' count de spinnin'-spiders in my vines an' smoke my pipe, any day I feels like takin' a rest—an' dey ain't nobody to order me to rise an' shine—an' you see I 'm gittin' on in yeahs now—an' facin' todes de western shore o' de sea-blue sky.

''An' every evenin', de sun sinks into it to baptize off all de sin he 's been lookin' on all day—an' all de sorrer—so as to be able to come up clear an' courageous next mornin'. An' seem like my soul goes down wid 'im—an' den I sleeps in de under world whar he goes tell his clair eye strikes my bed nex' mornin'. An' wid nobody to call me, or give me no orders, I sort o' lives wid Gord's blessin'

by de sun, an' 'g'in' he gits in de high heavens, he gen'ally finds me singin' an' rejoicin'.

"I watches for de noon-day hour when I can't find no shadders on de earth—an' I say to myself: 'He shall wash all tears f'om yo' eyes, glory hallelujah! His glory is in de heavens!'

"Den I wanes in peace at my ironin'-boa'd whilst de shade creeps over my little gyarden-beds—an' so it goes.

"I thought maybe de little feller mought 'a' been sont to *me—jes' to me* —ma'am—but all de planets p'ints de yether way, now, an' I rej'ices in his riches—so I gwine peacen my sperit again, and give 'way to de Lord's will."

This was a strong spirit, and not an easy one to oppose.

It took three visits from the old lady, herself, to induce Sarah even to go and

see the dainty cabin awaiting her—facing the east, it was true, instead of the west, but she soon saw how she could readjust herself, going to bed with the western light upon her very pillow and rising to meet the morning.

There was, she confessed, a charm in the fresh place, but when she went up to the house and saw the great picture and the real harp, while her heart swelled with pride for the boy, she said sadly:

"Yo' gran'daddy favors my boy mo 'n you does, George—but, of co'se, you an' de madam, heah, an' even de dorg, is got antsisters in de picture—an' I 'd be jes' a comer an' goer, to look at y 'all's granjer whenever de lady 'd lemme me step above my place, an' my heart 'd be back in my little cabin wid the shingle-patched fence—an' boy's things all strowed aroun'."

"Den, of co'se," answered George, and his face was a study of character while he said it, "of co'se, ole mis', you see, I 'll b'long to you-all's family all de same—but Aunt Sarah, she needs me. She got a quare motion of her lef'-han' hip when she turns of a sudden. I don't 'low for her to lif' no mo' tubs o' washin' widout me to take a hand—but, please, ma'am, don't confine me to no special week-day when I kin come to see you—an', of c'ose, sence you got dat gol' chain to yo' spec's, dey holds to yer an' you don't need me so constant—*maybe*—ef you sesso—I could come an' go—an' keep my place—but if not, Aunt Sarah—"

The woman, Sarah, had followed the boy's words with bated breath, and now, quieting him by a peremptory wave of her hand, she turned to his benefactress:

"What day would you like me to move in, ma'am?" she asked with fine composure. "You see, de chile, he done got me whar I can't take him or leave him, but *I 'll foller 'im*—an' I 'll try to suit you, ma'am—wid de washin'. I reckon it 'd take me a day or so to pack —an', of co'se, my gyarden—"

"Is just planted, I know. How nice for whoever rents the place next! But why move your furniture? Why not take anything you particularly care for —and sell the rest? Your cabin shall all be new and fresh. Maybe some poor people will come after you, and those things would be useful to them."

"I knows a mighty needful family o' folks whar I stayed de few days after gran'daddy died—Aunt Ca'line Walker —an' she got a whole passel o' chillen an' mighty little yard-room, let alone gyar-

den," George impulsively put in, not hesitating until he had done.

The detail of moving is in its very phraseology suggestive of weariness and confusion.

Of course, Sarah was soon comfortably housed in the cabin prepared for her, and her mistress's assurance that she should be responsible for the laundry-work alone, taking her own time up to the weekly accounting for the same, with its surer and better pay, made the place, in every sense, a promotion.

And she had the boy, too, "to memorize her of her own, whilst he drawed her to hisself," as she put it—and he lifted many a small burden for her. He had even taken up and replanted her choicest flowering vines and shrubs for her, carefully filling and leveling the ground from

which they came, so that when Caroline and her brood should come, it might not seem denuded. (And they came without delay, "so that the happiness in it might not have time to cool.")

Sarah's mind could never compass a realization of the great wealth which would warrant so lavish expenditure as the purchase of all her furniture and its unreserved presentation to the needy incoming tenants.

The quiet elegance of the home, of which she very soon felt herself a part, stimulated her pride, and the old linens and fine lace draperies of the house came from her nimble and shapely fingers "jes' like new, only better," really, as she claimed.

"I washes time out o' old things an' de shop scent out o' new ones," she liked to boast, "an' in de place o' de smell of

must or dust, I sends 'em in sweet as new grass."

The story is told—so far as a story need be, answering its beginning. What happened after; how George studied, in his own way; how, at last, in a romantic turn of the tale, he came to own the gold harp, and what he did with it; how this and that and the other happened—

There are no end of stories which start at intervals along the stem of any worthy tale, like offshoots from a live branch, each with its bud and flower of romance at the apex.

It does seem worth the turning back, just a minute, to relate how George went to Caroline's, to bear his lady's invitation to her. When the old lady authorized his bearing the message (and he was eager to go), her face suddenly lit with the spirit of fun, while she said:

"Don't go yet, George. I shall go for a drive this evening"—she meant afternoon—"and you may go with me."

"You mean you gwine drive 'way out yonder, past dem blackberry hedges an' de palmetter-swamp? Dey so many my-color chillen, an' tin cans an' ole shoes layin' roun'—an'—an' goats—an' Aunt Ca'line, she ain't nothin' but poor. She 'll work one week an' rest two. She ain't like my Aunt Sarah. An'—an' dat's mighty bad travelin', ole Mis', for yo' span o' horses. Dey won't take no pride in dat journey, I know."

"I was n't thinking of the horses, George," she laughed. "I was thinking that, possibly, as you say you have never told them what your Christmas gift was, last year, they might ask you again."

And George, his face in a broad grin, answered:

"No 'm, I ain't no mo 'n sont 'em word I was doin' fine, an' dey mought keep so-an'-so, what I lef' dar for my three days' boa'd. Lordy! So dey might." Then, growing more sober, he asked:

"Does Christmas gif's ever come de day arter Christmas?"

"Certainly; they are often a little late—detained on the way."

"Den, by jimminy! I got 'em! Even ef dey don't ax me, I 'll git it all in. I 'll git even wid dat 'n what gimme dat reluctioned blow on his whistle—an' de gal wha' lemme bite de stomach out 'n her candy cow—an' all de rest—an' I 'll say, 'By the way, talkin' 'bout Christmas gif's, I tol' y' all, I *went for mine*, you ricollec'? Well, *yonder it is*,' an' I 'll p'int to you an' de rig. An' ef dey dares to 'spute me, I 'll call 'em out to

yo' ca'iage do', please, ma'am, an' you back me wid de story—jes' shortened up, little like bird-shot. I don't want to hurt nobody. Dey-all, dey 's good an' charitable—but they did n't make no proper 'lowance for me dat Christmas. She could 'a' baked me one dorg-cake wid sugar on it! Or even cut a hole in one to mark it for me, even ef she give de baby my mark out o' my middle."

And so it all happened—the visit—reminiscences—all. Instead of feeling as people generally feel after receiving a volley, however, George's friends seemed all made happy by his grandeur, for, while the wheels rolled away, Caroline was heard to say:

"Well, who 'd 'a' thought it! De ole man tol' de clair truth, arter all." And as she looked across into the waste of

green beyond the rubbish about her cabin, she laughed: "Lordy me! I wush-t all dem palmetters had eyes in all dey p'ints. Only ole blind Aunt Bella, to see granjer at my gate—an' *she* could n't see it."

"Huccome you reckon he thought about fetchin' deze whistles an' candy cows along, mammy?" said one of the children. "Dey sho' does blow loud an' tas'e sweet."

"Can't prove it by me, chillen," Caroline answered. "George allus was one cu'yus little nigger."

It might be said that the boy George, having known only poverty and deprivation during his early years while he followed his aged relative from one woodpile to another, could scarcely have realized higher conditions.

But it must be remembered that the

actual conditions of life count for very little to those whose castles are in Spain, where they live in affluence, undisturbed by life's vicissitudes. And this Spain is of rather uncertain geographical location, too.

Sometimes, as in the old black man's case, it is far back in the memory-country, while with others, particularly the younger inhabitants, it lies high ahead upon the sun-lit mountains of hope.